

Iraqi Media Watch: March 3, 2006

Current Translations from the Iraqi Press

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Al-Iraqiyya

In an interview, the Minister of Interior, Baqir Jabr told the reporter that he is under pressure to let the political process go forward. This, he said, means that his ministry does not pursue the terrorists as it should in order to keep the radical Sunnis on board.

TV coverage is playing down the major dispute between Ibrahim al-Ja'fari and the Kurds. There seems to be a coup against al-Ja'fari and his faction—including the bloc of Moqtada al-Sadr. This is also the desire of the Americans and the British who dislike al-Ja'fari. It is very unlikely that the UIA is going to replace him. What does this mean? Well, for starters, a big delay for the formation of a government. Consequently, there will be more violence and uncertainty. Iraqis are not served by this fight. If the situation explodes, be certain that it will be blamed on the Americans, because they made their position clear regarding al-Ja'fari.

TV covered live two court sessions trying Saddam Hussein. The prosecution introduced documents with signatures and notes claiming that they were Saddam's own handwriting. The last two sessions were the strongest in linking Saddam and his brother, Barzan, to the massacre. Saddam on Wednesday admitted that he was responsible for giving the orders to destroy the orchards and that he referred the 148 residents of Dujail to the Revolutionary court. He asked the judge to release the others because he was the one responsible for everything. However, he claimed that he was acting according to his authority as the president of Iraq.

Al-Rafidayn

The paper's main headline addressed the dispute between the Kurds, the Sunnis and Allawi's list on the one hand and the UIA on the other, over the nomination of al-Ja'fari. The paper quoted Sami al-Askari, a UIA member, as saying that "there is no intention to nominate another person, other than al-Ja'fari, because doing so will destroy our alliance," adding that, "the calls for a replacement is a violation of our electoral right" as the winning list. According to the Iraqi constitution, the winning list has the right to nominate the prime minister, but he must gain the

confidence of the majority in the legislature. The UIA's 130 seats are not enough to ensure al-Ja'fari's confirmation. He needs more than two-thirds.

Az-Zaman

The paper published a short, but very disturbing, article. According to the paper, the forces of the Ministry of Interior raided the headquarters of the 16th Brigade (Iraqi Army) and arrested a number of its soldiers, accusing them of collaborating with the terrorists. It is very odd to see the ministries responsible for security in the country fight with one another, instead of working together against terrorism. Sad indeed. The 16th Brigade is responsible for the protection of oil pipes.

The paper also highlighted the admission Saddam made on Wednesday that he was responsible for giving the orders to destroy the orchards and that he referred the 148 residents of Dujail to the Revolutionary court.

The paper quoted al-Ja'fari as saying that his visit to Turkey was absolutely legal. He was criticized by President Talabani, whose office issued a strong statement saying that the Iraqi government is not going to honor any deals al-Ja'fari make in Turkey. The Kurds are against any talks with Turkey without their prior consent and active participation. Al-Ja'fari did not inform the President and his delegation did not include a Kurd, but it did include a Turkoman. The right hand not informing the left hand is the way Iraq these days is run. The dispute comes in the context of the fight for power between al-Ja'fari and the President. The latter is unhappy with his job description. He wants more power. This is against the "philosophy" of the framers of the constitution who chose a parliamentary system to avoid a strong presidency.

Al-Sabah

The paper reports a meeting between Moqtada al-Sadr and Grand Ayatullah Ali Sistani. Moqtada has been very active recently. He made visits to Saudi Arabia, Iran, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. He was also the mastermind of having al-Ja'fari nominated for prime minister, pushing aside the U.S. favorite, Adel Abdulmahdi, by one vote, to the surprise of everyone. He was also making a huge impact on the street. His visit to Maysan province was a huge success. He is learning fast. Fixing the relation with Sistani is very important for Sadr's legitimacy as a key Shi'i leader.

The paper also quoted the head of the central criminal court in Baghdad as accusing the executive authorities for not carrying out the death sentences given to 116 criminals last year and 17 this year. Only 8 people were executed. Unlike the system in the United States, Iraqi law mandates that a death sentence to be carried out 30 days after the sentence is passed. The paper reports in another article that 36 people, including a Saudi citizen, were sentenced to different terms of jail for various crimes.

Al-Sabah al-Jadid

The paper reports on the agony of Iraqis who apply for passports. It is harder than any marathon. One of the worst legacies of the Saddam regime. It is odd that many Iraqi agencies still operate according to the same system set by the past regime. People, according to the paper, are humiliated and even the bribes, which they pay everywhere, are not helping to ease their frustration.

Al-'Adalah

The paper reports that Abdulaziz Al-Hakim called for opening more than one border crossing with Turkey (could this be part of what al-Ja'fari was negotiating in his visit?)

The paper also reports that next week will witness the final talks among the major political groups to nominate the Presidential Council and the prime minister, quoting Dhiyaa al-Din al-Fayyadh, a member in the UIA. According the constitution, the confirmed president and the two vice presidents will ask the winning list to nominate the prime minister. But, in reality, everything must be negotiated before any confirmations. In other words, the candidates for president and vice presidents must come from lists that promise to confirm the prime minister before any vote takes place in the legislature. But this negotiation cannot continue indefinitely, as it happened after the first election in January 2005, because the constitution sets a strict time frame for the process to be completed.

Tariq al-Sha'ab

The paper quoted the Minister of Construction and Housing as saying that it will take five years to reconstruct the Askari shrine in Samarra, which was destroyed by terrorists last week. The director of the Shi'i Endowment, Salih al-Haydari, who took part in the press conference, said that the reconstruction will be handled by his agency and the Ministry of Construction and Housing. This is very interesting, because the shrine has been controlled by the Sunni Endowment. This declaration seems to signal that the care for the shrine will be transferred to the Shi'i Endowment. Although this makes perfect sense, given the nature of the shrine, it is unlikely that the Sunnis will surrender the shrine without a major fight.

Al-Haydari already told the London newspaper, Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, that the shrine is a Shi'i shrine and "according to the Law of Mosques and Shrines No. 19 of 2005, this shrine belongs to the Shi'i Endowment."

Al-Mada

The paper published an article citing a Zogby poll indicating that 72% of U.S. soldiers want to United States to withdraw from Iraq (29% immediately; 22% within six months; and 12% within a year). The paper claims that 85% of the soldiers believe that the United States is in Iraq to retaliate against Saddam Hussein for his role in the attacks of 9/11.